

[Estimadxs colegas: Lo que les comparto ahora es apenas el primer borrador de un apartado que forma parte de un trabajo —obviamente en gestación— que busca acercarse a la historia espacio-social de la ciudad de México, sobre todo del siglo XVIII, a partir de un puñado de mapas célebres. En el orden en que he ordenado los apartados, estos son los mapas de Leopoldo Batres sobre Tenochtitlan-Tlatelolco (1892), de Juan Antonio Alzate sobre los barrios indígenas en el siglo XVI (1789), del mismo Alzate para la reordenación de las parroquias (1769), el que acompañó la división de la ciudad en cuarteles mayores y menores (1782), de Diego García Conde (1793) y las varias versiones de los de Ignacio Castera para ampliar la traza (1794, 1795), así como la parte “urbana” del atlas de Alexander von Humboldt (1812). Les agradezco de antemano la lectura de las páginas que siguen, y aguardo con interés sus comentarios y observaciones críticas.]

#### **4. Miscegenation Mirage**

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On December 7, 1782, a verbose if beautifully printed edict, signed by Martín de Mayorga, viceroy of the realm and president of its highest court, announced the creation of a new system of local justice administration for the largest city in the New World: eight “police” wards, each one of them subdivided in four precincts, intended to lower the crime rate and generally to improve life in New Spain’s capital. While ruling over the main quarters would be entrusted to acting judges—the five members of the high court’s criminal section, the king’s representative to the Mexico City council, and two aldermen from the same (Spanish) corporation—the newly created precincts would be headed by a new type of functionary: the neighborhood *alcalde* (not to be confused with the elected officials from Mexico City’s three municipal bodies), whose powers would be limited to conducting criminal investigations, arresting criminals, and inspecting public facilities where alcoholic beverages were sold or consumed. Although their functions made them look like modern, bureaucratic officials, the new “judges” were nevertheless expected to

[...] extinguir, si es posible, los juegos prohibidos, la embriaguez y la holgazanería, madre común de los vicios, y [...] cuidar de la limpieza de las

calles, empedrado, alumbrado y de todo lo que pueda contribuir a fomentar la industria, artes y oficios, para que se evite la vergonzosa desnudez que se ve en la mayor parte de la numerosa plebe de esta ciudad; [...].

Three days earlier, viceroy Mayorga had approved the regulations that would govern the new institution—a 30-article strong *reglamento* written by high court judge Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara that detailed the new functionaries’ responsibilities as well as the city dwellers’ new duties. Its most significant provision—indeed a key element for the success of the system—was perhaps that the new judges had to live within the terms of their jurisdictions. Unsurprisingly, for the whole point of the *alcaldes*’ existence was to better know and hence better control the city population, and this could only be achieved by the *alcaldes* living in the midst of their subjects. As Ladrón de Guevara imagined them, in fact, the judges were to be as fathers to a “citizenry” perceived as lazy, drunk, and potentially deviant. It would seem that taking over the city, for once and all, could only be done by close, almost intimate surveillance—exactly the type of omniscient gaze Jeremy Bentham would make famous, a few years later, in his panopticon.

Given the regulation’s spatial concern, it is a little surprising that the document contained no actual definition of the wards’ borders and surfaces. A little surprising from an analytical standpoint—as it shows that late-eighteenth century New Spain had already adopted some of the epistemological principles we often take as characteristic of twentieth-century high modernity—but not at all from a practical point of view: for a week after the publication of his edict, on December 12, 1782, viceroy Mayorga published a map of the new jurisdictions. It is a handsome map, is it not? Although much rougher than the one José Antonio Alzate had drawn a decade earlier to define—while representing—the territories of the new parishes, this semi-anonymous piece of cartography is still quite compelling: the colors with which the “police” wards are defined, the red lines that demarcate the limits of its precincts and encircle the built environment seem to produce a rather homogenous, unifying image of the city. (“Semi-anonymous” because I can only read the first name of who I believe to be the mapmaker: a certain Manuel.) More than in the textual arguments employed by Ladrón de Guevara and by Mayorga, the intention behind the reform is actually palpable here, in the solid areas and regular lines that, more often than not, portray the city as *one* city—indeed as a single, discrete urban settlement.

Noticing the map’s humble manufacture—its size and lack of scale, the clumsiness of

the lion crowning the *cartela*, the “inaccurate” depiction of some blocks and open spaces—is also important, for it forces us to realize that the map is not an artistic product but an act of government, indeed an exercise in visual governmentality as bold and explicit as Alzate's map of 1769, if not more. For the map not only aims to reform the city; actually, it imagines a city that did not exist. More subtly put, the map twisted the actual features of the city's social and political landscape to make it look exactly the way its author needed it to be. Indeed, the map does not represent the city as it “truly” was, but imagines it in a self-serving manner, in a likely attempt to naturalize its purpose; that is, in order to conflate its intention with the reality it sought to modify.

First and foremost, and exactly as Alzate's has done, the police wards map depicts the city as a territory unencumbered by the socio-architectural divide that had structured the three-headed *urbs* since the foundation of Mexico City in the 1520s—a never-absolute yet rather palpable divide that can be perceived in the 1777 religious census and would be evident in the nomenclature deployed by Diego García Conde's map of 1793. Such an alteration in the urban fabric consists of two main cartographic actions, one fairly common among eighteenth-century mapmakers—the tendency to underestimate the architectural differences between the Spanish city and the indigenous barrios—while the other intriguingly exclusive to the surveillance policy embodied in the wards—the unusual decision of circling the outer limits of the city, as though the city had in fact *borders*.

Unusual and odd, for one of the many instances in which Mexico City departed from the “Western” model of preindustrial urbanism was precisely its lack of physical barriers setting city and country unmistakably apart, the fact that—as the engravings at the bottom of García Conde's map would beautifully show—Mexico City had always been an “open city” ever since the (partial) draining of the lake. In Ladrón de Guevara's imagination, moreover, the city was not only a bounded territory: it would also be, at last, the neatly segregated space its (Spanish) founders had wanted to inhabit. Pity the colonia(ist) dream, though: for the city—as we have seen and will see again—could never live up to such expectations, nor was it—as we have seen and will see again—the undifferentiated *mestizo* space some have imagined it to be.

The problem, of course, is that drawing an idealized portrait of the city was not the same thing as making the city grow such imaginary features. It would have been necessary to transform the lives of a large portion of the urban population; indeed, between a quarter and a third of those who called Mexico City home (no matter if they meant different things

by “Mexico City”). The regulation tried. In order to do so, however, it had first to recognize that the sixteenth-century segregation scheme had long ceased to exist. Like so many orders given by Spanish authorities throughout the colonial period, article 19 of the regulation begins with an acknowledgment of weakness: a call to enforce all the previous commands regarding the presence of *indios* within the city’s limits, ordering them to move back to the jurisdiction of any of the two indigenous polities. (Mayorga’s paragraph on the subject would reaffirm this obviously unfulfilled dream.) Only two kinds of *indios* could remain “inside” the grid: domestic servants and artisans belonging to an officially sanctioned guild. At that early point already, though, Ladrón de Guevara’s plan was faltering, for it chose to ignore that the majority of Mexico City’s *indios* had long been engaged in “artisan” labor, either in guilds or independently. Eighteen years after the creation of the police wards, only a tiny percentage of all San Juan Tenochtitlan tributaries would be counted as peasants or agricultural workers of some kind—whether they lived within or beyond the grid.

At any rate, the real oddity of the regulation happens in the third part of article 19, where, under the surface of a compromising decision, the neoclassic ordinance tried, harder than ever, to obliterate both of the indigenous republics as Mexico City’s political components. So weird is the formulation that it is worth citing at length.

Aunque no se comprenden en estos cuarteles, los pueblos y barrios de indios de dichas parcialidades —en que hay gobernadores, alcaldes y regidores y están fuera de los canales—[,] pero sí los barrios de ellas, que están dentro en que habitan también gentes de otras calidades.

The sentence’s syntax alone would deserve a monument on its own, as it hints to the ambiguous nature of the indigenous barrios—entities that could be rural or urban and could be the same thing as a hamlet or a village. Noticeable as well is that a number of canals continued to crisscross the city (that is, that they were not only situated on the city’s edges), that it is simply not true that the central barrios did not have “ethnic” authorities, and that it is equally false that in the subject towns and barrios of Santiago Tlatelolco and San Juan Tenochtitlan there were only *indios* living. Furthermore, the phrasing of this dual action—explicitly excluding the indigenous republics’ territories from the reach of the new police wards, “exceptionally” including the barrios closest to the Spanish city, the ones presumably within the canals—speaks to the confusion, partly real, partly intended, most

non-indigenous bodies and authorities experienced when dealing with indigenous Mexico City.

On the one hand, the regulation explicitly excluded from the police wards' reach most dependencies or barrios of San Juan Tenochtitlan and Santiago Tlatelolco—a decision seemingly consistent with the fantasy of reestablishing (or rather establishing for the first time) a physical barrier between Spanish Mexico City and the two largest and richest indigenous polities in the realm. On the other hand, however, the regulation's deceptive wording becomes evident as soon as the territories of the new jurisdictions are taken into account: for most indigenous barrios—I mean their architectural cores, since Mexico City barrios were (still) more communities than neighborhoods in the contemporary sense of the term—were in fact included within the limits of the city imagined by the map. (Comparing Alzate's 1789 map of the sixteenth-century barrios to the areas covered and uncovered by the police wards map would give us a good sense of the operation—despite the problems we have already noticed about the former.) Which means that, in actuality, Ladrón de Guevara's plan extended the terms of the Spanish *civitas* to make it conterminous with the cosmopolitan *urbs*. Thus it could be said that the reform was at once exclusionary and conquering, and its intentions look even more ambitious than the parish reform of the early 1770s. Furthermore, since everything within its new terms would be placed under the jurisdiction of local judges appointed by the viceroy (not even by the Spanish city council), and since everything in the new and smaller periphery would be more clearly indigenous, socially as well as architecturally, it is fair to imagine that the reform's ultimate intention was to *hispanize* Mexico City as it sought to *indianize* the city's periphery. The fact that most people to this day continue to think of colonial Mexico City as a Spanish town—surrounded, if at all, by a number of inconsequential indigenous barrios—could be seen as a testament to the enduring allure of the narrative the 1782 map and regulation helped to consolidate.

Crowning the project, the wards' territories paid no attention nor respect to the fact that the city had—since the sixteenth century—consisted of three discrete entities, three “sub” cities with their own architectural plants, governing institutions, and dominant peoples, never fully integrated into a larger conglomerate yet never completely independent from one another. Unless one is aware of the city's history—or rather the cities' histories—the map offers almost no hint of the slow making of the (Spanish) grid, the dual nature of the pre-Hispanic polity, or the centrifugal force exercised by the three main markets and the

three municipal corporations' headquarters. In other words, the map depicts a city no longer made up by an orthogonal core, a northern "satellite," and the 70 urban nuclei—basically a church with a plaza—around which 70 indigenous communities clustered. With only one exception, the territory of each police ward included spaces previously developed as part of the Spanish city *and* spaces that had grown, most likely in an organic manner, as San Juan Tenochtitlan's constituent components. Telling, like all exceptions, the shape of ward number 8 should prevent us (should have prevented us) from reading into the wards' design too much of an attempt to think of the city *como un todo*: for ward number 8, the only one that is not square-shaped, "gathers" a region where most of Santiago Tlatelolco's barrios were located, as if rather than physical propinquity, the crucial criterion for the definition of the new jurisdictions had been, well, jurisdictional (albeit of a different kind).

Bourbon Mexico City's historiography has generally interpreted the reform's expansionist drive as yet another attempt to overcome the sixteenth-century ethnic divide—pretty much in line with the seminal argument made by Edmundo O'Gorman to account for the decision of "expelling" the *indios* living within the Spanish grid in the aftermath of the great insurrection of 1692—and thus as part of a larger narrative that stresses the mixed character of the city. Overall, moreover, the literature on colonial Mexico City has for a long time characterized the late eighteenth century as one of the critical moments of such process, as most of the changes promoted by the Bourbon kings, viceroys, archbishops, and even minor bureaucrats and local officials somehow implied blurring the distinction between the three republics and cities—the parishes and the police wards, the paved streets with their tax, the peripheral garbage deposits and cemeteries, Ignacio Castera's delirious vision, the project of relocating the largest industrial facility to the city's edge, and finally the suppression of Santiago Tlatelolco and San Juan Tenochtitlan in 1812. (Notice, by the way, that if both arguments were true, it should follow that the Spanish authorities failed to notice the structural shift towards the *mestizo* city for over a century!)

The literature on colonial Mexico City has also acknowledged that reorganizing the administration of local justice was the result a perceived problem: the disorder most authorities—most prominently the viceroy—believed was the main characteristic of the city's barrios. Less frequently recognized, though, is the fact that—until that moment—the "chaos" beyond the Spanish city had not quite been the city's problem or, more exactly, that the city's institutional architecture limited the ability of both the Spanish king's delegate and the Spanish corporation known as the "city of Mexico" to rule over the

territories and peoples placed under the jurisdictions of the indigenous republics of Santiago Tlatelolco and San Juan Tenochtitlan.

There is no doubt that, to a large extent, the so-called Bourbon reforms in Mexico City did seek to build a newer and different city, less indigenous and more European, more firmly under the grip of functionaries who were at the same time more authoritarian and insecure. But that does not mean that all late-eighteenth century initiatives could be interpreted as arising from the same rationalist, unifying, Eurocentric mold—in other words, it is time to recognize that the Enlightenment was not a coherent movement and also that “Enlightened Despotism” is less a historical reality than a historiographical trope. Further, that should not imply taking the Bourbon reformers’ words and actions at face value. For their goals, like any other ruler’s, could not, should not, be confused with their actual feats. More often than not, in fact, the confluence of two realities deeply affected the plans and projects made by the Bourbon authorities in the second half of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, the stubbornness of the communities they claimed to govern, or their own inability to effectively impose their will on human groups with a long tradition of contesting governmental desires through endless litigation. On the other, the curious way the Bourbon reformers had of exercising power—a demeanor Horst Pietschmann qualified as prudent and compromising in his classic study on the intendancies, which to me it looks more, and more simply, like arrogant posturing: the public pretense of changing the world while quietly surrendering to the old ways. Which is—obviously—what countless reformers had done before them and would do in the years to come: to deceive both their subjects and their students (us) with the brightness of their *lumières*.

Nonetheless, in order to look at the seams of Ladrón de Guevara’s trick we need a change of scale. A microscope, if you will. That is, we need to stop paying attention to the brightly colored surfaces defining the wards and the red lines that set the city’s borders, and look instead at the precincts, trying to understand the rationale underpinning their shape. One way to do it is to use a curious booklet published in 1811 that verbally outlines the terms of each precinct and ward, and even provides information about the judges in charge of them. Similar publications must have existed since the 1780s; this one is just the one to which I had access. But it could also be done through any of the many “translations” that the legendary Urban History seminar at INAH’s Dirección de Estudios Históricos has done of the 1782 map. So the Enlightenment’s mirage arises.

Given the Bourbon politics of surveillance, it is little wonder that precincts tended to

extend over a relatively compact group of blocks and, thus, that no precinct would comprise more than a handful of blocks or block-like structures. But there is nothing natural or inevitable in the shapes they had or in their actual limits. Thus precinct number 7 was a neat rectangle containing only 13 structures—likely because two of them were the monastery of Saint-Francis and the Biscayan College—whereas precinct number 24 has an elongated shape, probably so as to include the 15 structures built on the Tacuba causeway’s “banks”. Conversely, if “long” precinct number 28 encompassed as many as 56 structures it is only because within its terms the urban core of Santiago Tlatelolco was included but also a number of eastern, more scattered structures that could have integrated another precinct altogether (but they did not). Obvious as it may seem, the point is nevertheless crucial to understand the police wards reform’s ultimate paradox: namely, that the precincts’ borders were set intentionally by somebody—most likely Ladrón de Guevara himself—who in all likelihood had certain considerations in mind.

Lacking any documentary evidence of Ladrón de Guevara’s intentions, one is left to “walk” the borders of each precinct as they appear in *México dividida en cuarteles menores y mayores* and in the map of 1782. Thus one learns that the border between precincts numbers 1 and 2 runs on the “back” of the Dominicans’ monastery. Looking east and west, one could then notice that the same street—actually a canal with sidewalks—happens to be where the limits between precincts numbers 3 and 4, between precincts numbers 13 and 15, and between precincts numbers 14 and 16 have been set. That same street, again—right there where according to Alzate the border between Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan once stood, right there where the builders of the Spanish town had decided to stop reorganizing the compounds of the pre-Hispanic city in the sixteenth century. Exactly the same phenomenon could be observed on the west, the south, and even towards the east: the precincts’ borders follow *a pie juntillas* the imaginary terms of Alonso García Bravo’s city—between precincts numbers 3 and 21, between precincts numbers 7 and 29, between precincts numbers 7 and 8, between precincts numbers 5 and 6, between precincts numbers 9 and 10, between precincts numbers 11 and 12, between precincts numbers 11 and 17, between precincts numbers 14 and 25. Sonia Pérez Toledo has even published a map that makes the point visually incontrovertible, with the slightly irregular square of García Bravo’s city coexisting with the precincts’ borders drawn on García Conde’s map. Make no mistake, then: underneath the “new” precincts, underpinning its presumed homogenizing features, one of the oldest and deepest structural joints of the city was still alive and working—



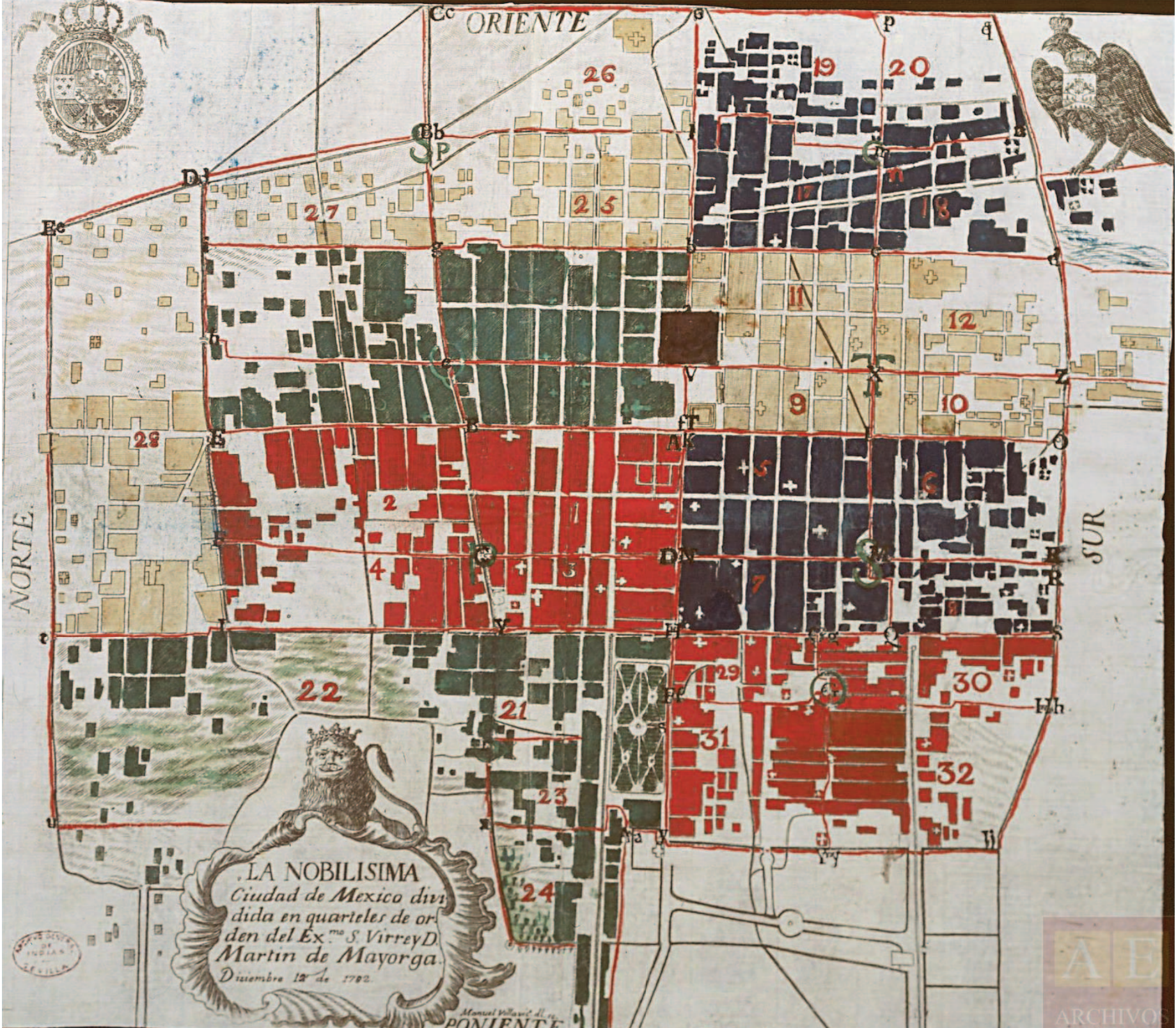
shaping the character of its newest institutions just as it continued to shape the architectural experience of its dwellers.

One has to wonder about the reasons Ladrón de Guevara had for *not* following the logic that led Alzate—and archbishop Lorenzana—to abolish the secular distinction between parishes for *indios* and parishes for everybody else and, moreover, to make his new ecclesiastical jurisdiction conterminous and exclusive territories. Indeed, the preservation of the Spanish-indigenous divide—yet only at the micro level—seems to contradict the centralizing ethos most historiography has identified as the force driving the neoclassic project in the Americas. Reconciling both aspects of the project of extending police surveillance towards Mexico City’s “Indian country” might only be possible if, on the one hand, Ladrón de Guevara’s deception is underscored and if, on the other, we can get closer to whatever rationality animated his trick. Noticing that the imposition of a new—*casta*-blind, if you will—system of justice administration could only succeed because the emerging jurisdictions did not even try to revolutionize the city’s spatial and social alluvial forces, in other words, may help us to better understand the project but it could lead to dismiss Ladrón de Guevara aspirations—to portray them as merely ridiculous. They were not.

Baltasar Ladrón de Guevara was actually a serious, busy man. Just as he was drafting the police wards regulation and presumably defining the terms of the new jurisdictions, he had been working on yet another viceregal commission—one that I believe explains the seemingly contradictory path he would follow regarding the role of both Mexico City’s indigenous republics and peoples. He was drafting the regulations that would govern the administration of the indigenous tribute in Santiago Tlatelolco and San Juan Tenochtitlan for the last forty-something years of its existence. A whole new regulation, in fact: for after more than a century of renting the tribute administration out to private entrepreneurs, the Spanish monarchy was reclaiming its daily management. Gone was the time when all the Spanish king knew about “his” two largest and richest indigenous republics was the fixed sum the *asentistas* were committed to deliver (but rarely did in full). Henceforth, direct administration implied, above all, accurate and continuous knowledge of families, barrios, villages, and the republics’ assets; in a word, a new kind of surveillance, stricter and more intimate. Needless to say, ruling in such a manner would be hardly possible in a city that had been witnessing and experiencing for over two centuries the competitive juxtaposition of physical patterns, judicial jurisdictions, labor practices, religious habits, clothing

customs, and drinking preferences—that city whose fluid and conflictive social “order” has always look “chaotic” to those who approach it from without.





LA NOBILISIMA  
 Ciudad de Mexico divi-  
 dida en quarteles de or-  
 den del Ex.<sup>mo</sup> S. Virrey D.  
 Martin de Mayorga.  
 Diciembre 12 de 1762.



Manuel Villavicencio del Rey  
 PONIENTE.

